

*So Our Histories Do Not Die: Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral
History Project*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

African-Americans have been attending what is now Ball State University from at least the 1920s, but very little has been recorded about their experiences here. As a member of the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project, my goal was to help record these individuals' stories, so that they could be written into the institution's history. As a team, we conducted oral history interviews with twenty African-Americans with experiences at Ball State to elicit stories of those experiences. These recorded interviews will permanently archived and stream able on the University Libraries' Digital Media Repository, along with verbatim transcripts. Through these recordings, future generations will learn about the struggles and triumphs of these individuals, and in this way, their histories shall not die, but live on.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Doyle, from whom I have learned so much about not only history, but about perseverance and grace under fire.

I would like to thank our assistant project directors Lisa Hensell and Chris Reidy, without whom this project would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my teammates Kristal, Janie, Rishad, Ellie, Charelle, Janae, Sam and Alan, whom I have learned and laughed with so much throughout this project.

Most importantly, I would personally like to thank the twenty African Americans who participated in our project. Your stories have inspired us all, and I am so proud that I could help you share them with the world.

Author's Statement

For my Honors Thesis, I participated in the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project along with eight other undergraduates of varying majors and years. The purpose of this project was to collect narratives from African-American alumni so that these stories could be included in the archived history of Ball State University. Although there have been African-Americans earning degrees from Ball State for nearly a century, little has been recorded about their experiences here. We aimed to change that.

Under the direction of Dr. Michael Doyle, our team of nine was charged with interviewing and recording eighteen interviews with African-American alumni. Each team member would conduct two interviews and record another two. At the end of our project, our hope was to have eighteen interviews full of life stories and Ball State experiences from the second half of the twentieth century.

In order to elicit these stories, we first learned a great deal of background information. This was necessary because in order to ask meaningful questions, an interviewer must have some knowledge of the interviewee's life and the context in which they lived. We first read a book titled *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* (2001), written by Anthony Edmonds and E. Bruce Geelhoed. This book is the most comprehensive and scholarly history of Ball State University, going all the way back to the university's earliest predecessor, Eastern Indiana Normal School, and reaching up until the turn of the century. The information learned from this

book would prove to be very useful when formulating questions about our interviewees' time at Ball State.

The next book we read was *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community* (2004) edited by Luke Eric Lassiter, et al. This book was a follow up to the Middletown Studies of Robert and Helen Lynd in 1929 and 1937. These groundbreaking studies looked at the culture of Muncie, but left out the African Americans of the community. Through the lens of cultural anthropology, *The Other Side of Middletown* aimed to fix that by exploring Muncie's African-American community, delving into such topics as religion, family life and leisure activities. It also shared a great deal of information about the history of African Americans in Muncie, including important events, such as the last lynching north of the Mason-Dixon line, which occurred just north of Muncie in Marion, Indiana in August 1930, the desegregation of Tuhey Pool, and Muncie Southside High School's "race riots" in 1968. This book would prove to be very useful in formulating questions to all interviewees about family life and upbringing, but it was especially important for formulated questions to alumni who had spent a great deal of time in Muncie, rather than just their college years. This book, together with the book on the history of Ball State, gave us the information necessary to pose thoughtful and intelligent questions.

Our final book was not related to which questions to ask, but rather how to ask them. It didn't deal with African-American alumni of Ball State, but rather with oral history interviews. It was titled *Doing Oral History* and written by Donald Ritchie. Through this book we learned the basics of oral history interviews. It

covered many topics including how to establish rapport, ask tactful questions, react to an interviewee's strong emotions or respond to an interviewee when you disagree or think he or she may be lying. This book proved to be indispensable in learning how to get the best interview possible.

To supplement our knowledge from these three books and to help us formulate questions, we attended two workshops and one fieldtrip. First was the fieldtrip, where we attended the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, located in Detroit, Michigan. Here we learned a great deal about the history of African Americans, from their ancestors origins in Africa, all the way through the present. Our trip was fortuitously timed in February, which is also Black History Month. Since the museum was also a lively hub of celebration of Black History Month, we got a wonderful opportunity to immerse ourselves in this culture. This was an eye opening experience. Although I grew up in a diverse neighborhood and went to diverse schools, as a Caucasian, I had always been a part of a racial majority. Our visit to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History was a unique experience, because for many of us, it was our first time being part of a racial minority.

Our first workshop was on Oral History Methods and was conducted by our professor and advisor, Dr. Doyle. This workshop mostly reinforced what we learned in the Ritchie book. We talked about building rapport through pre-interview contact, the importance of body language, how to ask controversial questions, and how to wrap up an interview, along with other important information. This

workshop was especially helpful because Dr. Doyle has conducted countless oral history interviews, and it was great to hear his advice and get to ask him questions.

Our second workshop was on targeted research on Ball State University, African-American Alumni and Muncie Black History, and was presented by Michael Szajewski and Brandon Pieczko of the Ball State University Libraries. Here we learned more about the University Archives and Special Collections, and all of the resources there that could be helpful in learning more about our interviewees' time here at Ball State. They exposed us to many new resources, including archival resources digital and print form. We learned that you could find school newspapers and yearbooks dating back decades, which would prove to be excellent for learning more about what our interviewee's were involved in on campus, as well as learning more about what was going on in general during their time at Ball State.

The next step of our journey was practice interviewing. We invited two African Americans to campus to participate. One, Dr. Ruby Cain, was an alumna, while the other, Tony Robinson, was a Ball State University student in the early 1970s, but never earned a degree. We each interviewed one of these individuals for about ten minutes, asking them questions about their childhoods, college days and lives after college. They both proved to be engaging and exciting interviewees, and I think this experience which further stoked our anticipation for our real interviews. If we got such great responses in fifty-minute interviews, we couldn't wait to see what kind of things our interviewees would say in two-hour interviews. After the practice interviews, we did a critique session where we offered one another advice on how to improve our interviewing skills, using a set of criteria for oral history

interviews. The practice interviews proved to be very helpful. They gave us a chance to practice in a low-pressure situation, and they also gave us a myriad of ideas for topics to explore and questions to ask in our real interviews.

Finally it was time to start our interviews. We were each responsible for conducting two interviews and video recording two more, each one planned to last up to two hours. With nine team members each conducting two interviews, we needed to find eighteen African-American alumni to interview. This proved to be much harder than expected for our three project directors. Due to a variety of circumstances, we were unable to find all eighteen interviewees before we began interviews. This meant that some interviews had to be postponed because we couldn't find anyone to interview, and other interviews were set a very short time before they were conducted, giving some interviewers less than twenty-four hours of preparation. Also due to scheduling issues, we had to expand our search. Instead of interviewing just alumni, we began reaching out to retired faculty members and students who never received a degree.

The first interview that I conducted was one where I was only given a very short amount of time to prepare. My interview was set for Monday, March 23 at 10 am. Several days prior, I was told that I would be interviewing a man named Anthony Williams. However, I knew basically nothing besides his name. I did not know his age or the dates that he attended the university. I didn't know his major or his current profession. I did not know any of this information until I received his biographical information form, which was sent to me in an email fewer than seventeen hours before my interview. I was at a family event at the time, and didn't

read the email until about 10pm, giving me only twelve hours to research. Obviously I had to spend a huge portion of that sleeping. I was also out of town at the time and had to spend about two of those hours getting back to Muncie. I was left with effectively no time in which to research Mr. Williams's life. So I had to wing it.

Based on our class discussions, our readings, the practice interviews and common sense, I knew that there were some questions that I was going to ask everyone, no matter what. Since we were doing whole-life interview, no matter whom I interviewed, I was going to ask him when and where he was born, his parents names and occupations, if he had siblings, where he grew up and other things of that sort. I wanted to get a good background on his life leading up to their time here at Ball State. When it came to talking about time spent at Ball State, I was going to ask why he chose Ball State, how he paid tuition, what he chose to study and why, where he lived while attending Ball State and things of that sort. These would be questions that you could ask to any Ball State alumnus, whether they graduated in 1925 or 2015. I knew that I was going to ask any interviewee about his professional and family life since leaving Ball State. I also wanted to talk race. With any African-American alumni, I wanted to know whether or not he grew up in a diverse community, whether he thinks racism still exists, and if so, in what ways. I wanted to know about his thoughts on high incarceration rates of black males, and recent events such as the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in summer 2015.

Armed with these questions, and the few facts that I learned from Anthony Williams's biographical information form, I wrote up a list of questions for my

interview the night before. I really wanted to focus on two topics in this interview: education and diversity. From his biographical information form, I knew that Mr. Williams earned a degree in elementary education, and later became a elementary school principal. I wanted to know why he made those decisions. What led this man to devote his life to helping children? I also wanted to learn about his thoughts on educational issues, such as charter schools and standardized testing. From his biographical information form, I knew that he has lived and worked in Michigan City, Muncie and Marion, all of which are very diverse Indiana communities. I wanted to know how he experienced this diversity, and how it impacted him.

I thought that my interview with Anthony Williams went very well. He was a very engaging speaker, and I think we had several really great quotes about education, race and Ball State. I think anyone could learn a great deal from watching this interview.

What I took away from this interview was a new respect for educators. I'd always respected teachers and other educators, but hearing Mr. William's passion gave me a whole new perspective. That man lives to help children, and I think that that is the most honorable thing that someone could do. His dedication to teaching truly opened my eyes. Hearing him speak made me want to spend my life serving others, just like he does. He truly inspired me, and I am so glad that I got to interview him and help him share his story with the world.

My next interview was scheduled for Thursday, March 26 at 3 pm. I received Dr. William O'Neal's biographical information form about a week before our interview, so I had plenty of time to prepare. From his biographical information

form, I knew that he was born in 1939 in Mississippi but had moved to Muncie by the time he graduated high school. I knew he was at Ball State for his undergraduate degree from 1957 to 1961, and he majored in elementary education. He played varsity basketball at Ball State and joined a fraternity. He went on to become a teacher and then an administrator. He returned to Ball State to get a master's and doctorate. From this information, I knew a lot of what I wanted to talk to him about. I wanted to talk about racism that he faced growing up, especially if he stayed in the Jim Crow south long enough to remember and experience racism there. I wanted to talk about the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. I wanted to talk basketball, being a huge sports fan myself. I wanted to talk about education, especially since I was still feeling very inspired from speaking to Anthony Williams just a few days earlier.

In my research, I found yearbook pictures of Dr. O'Neal. The basketball pictures stunned me. I found team pictures for three of his four years here, and there were not more than three black team members in any of them. I wanted to know more about this. I wanted to know how he got along with his white teammates, or whether the teams were separated along racial lines. I figured that due to the time period in which he grew up, he would have many stories of discrimination that would be a great addition to our project.

Interviewing Dr. O'Neal was by far my favorite part of participating in this project. His story was truly inspiring. His parents were sharecroppers in Mississippi, and neither one went to school beyond fifth grade. Their oldest son, William, earned a doctorate and became an assistant superintendent of a school corporation. I'd say

that's a great example of the American Dream in action, and achieving things that your parents could never even dream of. Dr. O'Neal was so full of interesting stories relating to race. He participated in the integration of Tuhey Pool. He was the first black teacher for many white children. He experienced segregation in restaurants and public parks. He was hired by Muncie Community Schools in a special administrative position to help improve race relations during the race riots at Muncie Southside. He was a victim of racial profiling by police. He just had so many stories of discrimination and oppression, and I was so inspired by his attitude toward it. He persevered and never showed hatred or hostility to his oppressors. His hope for the future was inspiring, and I'm so very grateful for the opportunity to meet him, hear his story and help him preserve it for posterity.

After we finished our interviews, we were responsible for creating verbatim transcripts. We attended another workshop at the University Libraries' Archives and Special Collections on oral history transcripts in order to learn the accepted best practices. Although transcribing was tedious, it was also very rewarding. Listening to my interviews was great, because I got to just listen this time, rather than trying to listen and formulate questions at the same time. I could also go back and play something again if I didn't quite understand what was being said. While transcribing, I heard things that I didn't remember the first time, and it allowed me to further delve into and reflect more deeply upon the interviewees' responses.

Looking back on my experience working on the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project, I am nothing but grateful for this experience. I conducted two interviews, video recorded two others and listened to one other

interview in its entirety and I can honestly say that each of those five stories has added something to my life. I have learned so much about history, research methods and transcription, but I've also learned things that I find far more important. I've learned how to be a better listener. I now feel more able to talk start up a conversation with anyone, particularly people who are different than me, about anything. I now feel more comfortable speaking about race, especially with people of races different than my own. I also feel more comfortable speaking with people who come from generations vastly different than my own. I also learned how to improvise, because my interviews didn't always go in the direction that I expected, but I had to go with it. I've learned so much about teamwork from working so closely with the eight undergraduates and three project directors. I believe that I really grew as a person through this project. Overall, I think that participating in the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project has been a remarkable capstone to my college career, teaching me a huge array of different skills, and applying the things I have learned from my minor in history.

Works Cited

Edmonds, Anthony and E. Bruce Geelhoed, *Ball State University: An Interpretive History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.

The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community ed. By Luke Eric Lassiter, et al. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004.

Ritchie, Donald, *Doing Oral History*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.

The following pages are the contents of my portfolio for the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project. These documents are as follows:

- Anthony Williams
 - Biographical Information Form (2 pages)
 - Prepared Questions/Topics (2 pages)
 - Verbatim Transcript (43 pages)
- William O'Neal
 - Biographical Information Form (2 pages)
 - Documentation of Concentrated Research (4 pages)
 - Prepared Questions/Topics (2 pages)
 - Verbatim Transcript (49 pages)

I have also included DVD copies of both interviews, as well as a copy of our project documentary.

“Hello, my name is Charlotte Sipe today’s date is March 23, 2015, and I am interviewing Anthony Williams on the Ball State campus as part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project.”

- Youth
 - General
 - Birth: where and when
 - Parents: names, occupations, education
 - Siblings: names, ages in relation
 - Distant Family: Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles living nearby?
 - Religion
 - Neighborhood: Urban, Suburban? Friends in neighborhood?
 - Elementary School
 - Where? If private, why?
 - Was education stressed in your family?
 - School experience: favorite subject, racial discrimination
 - Middle/High School
 - Where? If private, why?
 - Extracurriculars? Why those?
- College
 - Why Ball State?
 - Major? Why? Did you ever change?
 - Did you always know you wanted to teach?
 - Why elementary?
 - Today mostly girls, true back then?
 - Did you ever feel discriminated against or isolated?
 - First thoughts? Nervous, excited?
 - Live freshman year?
 - Did you make friends easily?
 - How? Class, dorms, clubs?
 - Mostly black?
 - Did you find Muncie/Ball State more or less progressive than Michigan City as far as race relations?
 - 9/11: How did you deal? How did campus react?
 - How paid for school?
 - Did you join any activities? Which ones and why?
 - Where did you live later on?
 - Any mentors?
 - It took you five years to finish your undergrad. Why?
 - Graduation: Excited, nervous, ready or not?
- After College
 - First job? How did you get this job?
 - Why stay in Muncie?
 - Did you face discrimination in this job, racial or gender?
 - Why did you decide to get your masters? Was this always the plan?
 - Same time as working, grad online?

- Administrative jobs?
 - Where (names of schools)
 - Why this age group?
 - Why in Indy?
- You married during your Assistant Principal job. Wife's name?
 - How did you meet her?
 - What does she do?
- You have a child, correct?
 - Name, age
- Involvement with Ball State since graduation
 - How?
 - Why?

“Before we close the interview, is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you would like people to know about your life, career, or experiences at Ball State?”

“On behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project I’d like to thank you for your participation.”

Archives and Special Collections

University Libraries



Ball State University
Bracken Library, Room 210
Muncie, IN 47304

Phone: 765-285-5078
FAX: 765-285-8149
Email: libarchives@bsu.edu

Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project

Archival Identification:

Interviewer(s): Charlotte Sipe

Interviewee(s): Anthony Williams

Date of interview: March 23, 2015

Sipe: Hello my name is Charlotte Sipe, today's date is March 23, 2015 and I am interviewing Anthony Williams on the Ball State campus, as part of the Ball State University African-American Alumni Oral History Project. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Williams: I was born in Michigan City, Indiana January 13, 1983.

Sipe: And what were your parents' names?

Williams: My father's name is Alan Williams, my mother's name is Sonora(??) Williams.

Sipe: And what did they do for a living?

Williams: My father, he has had several different positions in the human resources department worked for a company called Jaymar Ruby in Michigan City, Indiana. From that point he transitioned to AJ Wright, which is kind of a TJ Maxx conglomerate out of South Bend. And currently right now he is a director of the after-school Safe Harbor program in Michigan City area schools. So once again, he's always had kind of like that human resources type of position.

[1:00]

And my mother she is a secretary for a group of psychologists and psychiatrists at a company called the Swanson Center. So pretty much she does a lot of typing for a living.

Sipe: Did either of your parents have college educations?

Williams: They both did. My mother attended a community college in Fort Wayne. And my father attended Ball State University.

Sipe: Ok. Did you have any siblings?

Williams: I have one older brother. His name is Austin Williams. He attended college actually on a basketball college Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois. So he went there for four years. He is thirty four.

Sipe: Okay, so how much older than you?

Williams: Two and a half years.

Sipe: Okay so tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in.

Williams: It's a—it's a neighborhood that depending on what block you're on, you're gonna see different things. My—I was blessed from the standpoint that I did have two parents that were college educated.

[2:00]

But once again, that was not the norm in the neighborhood that I grew up on. So you would hear things on a week-to-week basis. You would hear gunshots, you would hear fighting going on. But you would also hear us playing outside, because that was something that my father and my mother were always very key on, is us having those relationships with our friends in the neighborhood. Another big thing with our neighborhood is that we attended the same school up until around maybe first grade. And then at that point, what they decided to do in Michigan City was close down the school that we attended. And we all were distributed amongst five different schools. So we saw each other a lot after school, but we all didn't attend the same school, which was kind of a negative and positive at the same time. But it was a very diverse neighborhood.

Sipe: Okay, so was your family religious at all?

Williams: Very religious. I don't think there was a Sunday that I did not attend church. When I was probably from birth all the way into high school.

[3:00]

So once again, that's something that's rooted within my family. I've had a grand—a grandfather that was a pastor, I've had an uncle that was a minister, but once again that's something that was taught early in the house: our belief in Christ, and our, our faith in his daily provisions for us. So I would agree that yes, we were very religious.

Sipe: And what domination did you—?

Williams: Baptist, Baptist.

Sipe: So, did your family put an emphasis on education? For you and your brother?

Williams: A strong emphasis on education. It's one of those things where they would always celebrate accomplishments. But at the same time, they would always kind of extend and increase that expectation. So when I was younger, we did, my brother and I, we did earn straight As, or we had As and Bs on our report card, and we would go out and celebrate. But then also they would pose that question "What can you improve on?"

[4:00]

So that taught us very early that there's always another stepping stone, something else that you can do to improve, and to continually be a lifelong learner. So yes, we were--yes.

Sipe: Okay, so where did you go to elementary school?

Williams: Went to Central Elementary School, which was the same school that my father attended. Then once again, when that school closed for various reasons, I ended up attending Edgewood Elementary School in Michigan City, Indiana. So once again, had some of the same students from my own neighborhood, but that also allowed me to be exposed to people from around the small town of Michigan City as well. So I had another diverse experience attending a different school.

Sipe: Were these public schools?

Williams: They were public schools, yes.

Sipe: Did your family ever consider private schooling, or—

Williams: No, and I think that's a part of my mother and my father wanting to give us that culture. So even with us growing up in the neighborhood that I described earlier, it was something that they wanted us to experience, what culture was like.

[5:00]

What the other students were living like on different sides of town. So even if it wasn't us attending a different elementary school, we were doing different things on Saturdays there's a university in Westville, Indiana, which is maybe fifteen minutes away from Michigan City called Purdue University North Central. And they would have different programs on Saturday called Super Saturday. So my mother and my father, they made sure that we would attend those programs even if it was something like researching dinosaurs, or researching the planets, so therefore we could be exposed to various things that weren't happening in our elementary school, but also the other students from around the city as well.

Sipe: So in elementary school, did you like school?

Williams: I love school, but I think it's the reason why I'm in education now is the people. It's the people that make a difference. So can I necessarily remember what I learned from a content subject area in fourth grade? Not necessarily. But I can remember the teacher and I can remember various conversations that I've had with specific teachers in elementary school. And for that matter, high school, college as well. So I think it's the relationships make the difference.

[6:00]

Sipe: What were some of your favorite subjects?

Williams: Social studies, once again, connecting that to specific people that taught. So Lucy Corwin(?) was an elementary teacher, one of my favorite teachers of all time. And the reason why I say social studies with her, is because she challenged me from a Black History standpoint. At that point in time, growing up with my father and my mother, they exposed us to a lot of the history, not only Black History but American History. And so, when I had Miss Corwin(?), she challenged me because I knew a lot. So therefore she would say to me "Okay, what else can you learn? So I know you know the basics about history, but let's take it a step further and learn a lot more." So history was always a favorite subject of mine. And we can throw math in there too.

Sipe: Okay, so where did you go to high school?

[7:00]

Williams: I went to Michigan City High School which consolidated from Michigan City Elston and Michigan City Rogers back in 1995. So I went to Michigan City High School, in Michigan City, Indiana. Um—it is the only high school in Michigan City. There is a Catholic high school, Michigan City Marquette. So once again, you have many elementary schools feeding into two middle schools feeding into one junior high, so I had a pretty large graduating class. Above 500. So a lot of different diverse people that I became friends with.

Sipe: Okay, so did you do any extracurricular activities in high school?

Williams: In high school, yes. Played basketball. I thought I was halfway good when I was in high school. Was a part of the marching band, was a part of any other band related activities. Spanish Club, National Honors Society. Things like that. But for the most part, band and basketball took up a lot of my time.

[8:00]

Sipe: Why'd you choose those activities over all the other ones you could have been doing?

Williams: I think just an appreciation for sports and music. And I think that's something I gained from my parents and my family, that love for music, regardless of the genre. And then with sports, that was always something that we were encouraged to play when we were younger. And then basketball was my first love, and so I've played that ever since I was three years old all way up until now, even though I don't play as much. But that is something that I can truly say was my first love, was playing basketball.

Sipe: Were there any other sports you tried out when you were younger?

Williams: Not necessarily. I wasn't a contact sport type person, so I didn't necessarily go out for football or, I wasn't an endurance person, so I didn't play soccer. So basketball was pretty much the only sport that I played. And that was one because I was halfway good at it, but also I had that support from my family.

[9:00]

And I can say probably something that no one else can say, is that I have every single basketball game that I've played on tape. From my peewee games on Saturdays, elementary, junior high, high school. And then my brother, even his college games. So my parents always made it a point to attend every single one of our basketball games.

Sipe: That's great. So you'd say you have a very supportive family?

Williams: Oh, definitely. Definitely supportive. If it wasn't through attendance, it was through phone calls. But once again, it was very supportive from parents, from grandparents, aunts and uncles, and then even with my brother. My brother, even in the midst of him getting ready for his games, he would attend my games. And then vice versa, I would also attend his games and support him as well.

Sipe: So, did you have more than just your immediate family living in Michigan City?

Williams: Living in Michigan City or the surrounding area—yes. Southwest Michigan maybe a little bit north in Michigan, towards the Lansing area, Chicago area.

[10:00]

But definitely a lot of family members, pretty much around, yes. Around Michigan City, Indiana.

Sipe: Okay, so, you graduated from high school and then went on to Ball State. Why did you choose Ball State?

Williams: It wasn't even a choice for me. It was the only school that I applied to. And I could have went to other schools in the state of Indiana or within the Midwest region. I probably could have went to some smaller schools, Division III, to play basketball. But Ball State was really the only school that I wanted to go to. Ever since I was younger. And I think that's—has a lot to do with the affiliation that I have with Ball State and the love that I have with Ball State from my father being so connected to Ball State. And pretty much visiting Ball State minimum six times a year. Ball State and Muncie was always my second home. And now it's my first home, so...

Sipe: So you didn't even apply anywhere else? No other options?

[11:00]

Williams: I didn't apply anywhere else. And it had nothing to do with academics. It just had everything to do with the preference of...Muncie has always been my second home and I love the campus and I wanted to attend Ball State University.

Sipe: How long had you known that you wanted to attend Ball State?

Williams: I would say in high school, when I started working after-school at the Safe Harbor after-school tutoring program. And it was at that point I was just looking for a job, just something to kind of earn some my money my junior and senior year. And then I started to realize that I really do have this passion for working with young children. So then that connection of knowing I wanted to work with young children and knowing that Ball State has an elite teachers' college, an elite elementary education program. It just kind of blended very well.

Sipe: Did your family always expect you to go to college, or was it kind of up to you?

[12:00]

Williams: I think the expectation is, something I also try to give to the students that—um—that I have the honor to lead at the school that I work at, is the expectation of lifelong learning. Um—so did my parents necessarily say “We want you to attend a higher level university?” Not necessarily. But it was putting me in a position to realize that for myself. So having me attend Super Saturday at Purdue North Central when I was younger kind of gave that expectation. Coming down to universities or attending other university events, so not only we could see what was going on from an athletic standpoint, but we would take tours of the university. That also kind of also gave us a sense of what higher education was all about. Had an opportunity to attend Summer Scholars at Ball State University. My brother attended that when he was in high school at well. So just the experiences I think allowed me to learn for myself what my next goal in life was

going to be.

[13:00]

Sipe: Okay, so taking it back just a little bit, in high school and elementary school, were your friend groups mostly—were they a diverse group or...?

Williams: They were very diverse. I think—I think if you asked people that I went to school with, they would say I was the person that got along with everybody. So it really didn't matter what clique any person was in when I was in high school. I was friends with everyone. I spoke with everyone. I hung out with everyone. So I was just kind of the captain of the basketball team that just kind of knew everyone. But at the same time, I was also kind of hidden from a standpoint, because I didn't hang out as much, I just knew everybody. But I still kind of kept to myself, had that family dynamic. So we were doing a lot of things from a family standpoint, not individual.

Sipe: Okay, did any of those friends come to Ball State with you?

Williams: I had quite a few, quite a few friends that came to Ball State. Um—I think Muncie and Ball State University has always been a pocket for Michigan City, Indiana.

[14:00]

I don't think that there's—there was ever a year that I was at Ball State that there weren't at least a good twenty to fifty people from Michigan City, Indiana. So I would say out of my graduating class, at least a good twenty people came to Ball State. Which made it easier, because then you had that pocket of people that you knew, so you had that friendly face, but also was a challenge because you knew you had to also branch out, and you had to—you know—meet and greet other people, and not stick with that core of what you'd been used to the last four years of high school. But definitely, there's always a strong pocket from Michigan City at Ball State.

Sipe: Okay, so when you came to Ball State, what did you choose to major in?

Williams: Elementary education. And that was a no-brainer for me, just because of my experiences that I had the last couple of years, working in an afterschool-tutoring program in Michigan City. So I chose elementary education, and then my concentration was psychology and counseling services.

Sipe: So you never changed your major? Stuck with it the whole time?

[15:00]

Williams: Never changed, never changed. And that's—that's a combination of lifelong

learning, that's a combination of the faith, and my background religiously. I didn't pick elementary education just because—one, not for the money—but I picked it because it's a purpose. And I think my purpose is to service other people, especially young people, and helping guide them to their dreams and what they want to become in their lives. So when I chose elementary education, through the ups and downs, the tough classes, the easy classes—yep, we stayed with it, stayed the course.

Sipe: Okay, so you said you learned you wanted to teach in high school.

Williams: Yes

Sipe: Why'd you choose elementary education, though?

Williams: I always joke, and I even say this joke now, that once students start to get to the point where they're my height or taller than me, then I'm not gonna mess with that. But I just think you have a lot more impact on trying to catch the children a little bit earlier in life.

[16:00]

Not to say they can't be caught and redirected when they get to high school or have that positive impact with middle school or high school—you know—students. But I think it's—there's just something about being able to look at—you know—a student in kindergarten and to watch them grow, which I'm currently in the process now of seeing some students that I taught get to middle school and high school. And so you see that really, really strong impact on planting that seed very, very early, and watching that seed grow. So I think that's why I chose elementary.

Sipe: Okay, and why did you choose the psychology concentration?

Williams: Just always kind of been interested in the psychology behind people, and that kind of comes from taking a psychology and a sociology class back in high school, and just kind of learning how to read people, and the reasons why groups of people do what they do.

[17:00]

So I think it was something very interesting for me to take the adolescent psychology course, the child psychology course, the adult psychology course, and kind of use that into what I do on a daily basis, which is deal with students, I deal with teachers, and I deal with parents. So I think it definitely benefited me, taking that as my concentration.

Sipe: Well I know today, elementary education is mostly girls. Was that true back then also?

Williams: It was. Probably no more than five males from the beginning of when I entered elementary education at Ball State University until when I graduated. So we always knew each other, and so if we had those same classes, we could come in and we would give that smile to each other, because we knew that this was a rarity, that we had that many—you know—males in one class. But once again, it's not a gender thing: it's really about who cares, and who does not care. So that's one of those things that we try to preach is it doesn't matter until you care.

[18:00]

And that's when the student really starts to really work for you, when that adult shows them that they care. So it really doesn't matter the background in which that educator comes from, it can be rural, it can be urban. Doesn't matter the age. If they care about a student, they'll get the results.

Sipe: Okay, so did you ever feel any kind of discrimination being one of the few boys? Or did you just feel overwhelmed by all the women?

Williams: Not necessarily, and I think that's once again, just a perspective thing. And so, the more that you learn about other people, the more that you learn how to interact with other people. So I always took that as, yes there may be twenty females and one male in a class that I am taking, but those twenty females all come from diverse backgrounds. They come from different places in the United States and different places across the globe, here at Ball State, because it's very diverse worldwide. So, just being able to work with all of the people, all of the students in my classroom, learn from them and use that in my every day life.

[19:00]

Sipe: All right, so when you first came to campus, what were your thoughts? Were you nervous or were you excited or...?

Williams: I was excited. A little nervous, just from the standpoint that once again, I did come to Ball State frequently, every single year, whether or not that was for alumni events, sporting events, things like that. But this is now me becoming a man, for lack of a better term. And so I'm gonna be here at Ball State, not with my father, not with my mother, but this is an opportunity for me to grow as a person. For me to do things individually. So definitely excited, and I think what helped me was the question you asked earlier about "Did I have any friends down here?" I had a lot of friends. So I had a lot of support at my age group, then also there were a lot of students that were my brother's age, that were already down here as well. So I had those two different pockets of support. Then of course I had my parents, who were used to the university as well. So I had that level of support.

[20:00]

And then on top of that, my father had a lot of friendships, strong friendships down here. So there were other people that, if necessary, I could reach out to them as well, so.

Sipe: Was it the first time you were really away from your parents?

Williams: Not necessarily. Throughout high school, they provided us the opportunities to attend, you know, different camps, whether or not they were academic camps, athletic camps, so there were opportunities that I did come down to specifically Ball State, and do things on my own for, you know, weeks at a time.

Sipe: Okay, so where'd you live your freshman year?

Williams: I lived in LaFollette, Woody/Shales 222.

Sipe: Okay, and did you have a roommate you already knew, or did you get a random roommate?

Williams: I had a roommate, he was from just outside of West Lafayette. And he was my roommate for the first semester, and then the second semester was a person that I grew up with back in Michigan City.

[21:00]

Not grew up with in my own neighborhood, but he was a person that I would see in the summer, and I would see on the weekends. So he was one of those students that I got, I got used to, and I was able to become friends with through the different cultural experiences that I had back when I was a kid. So it was definitely a blessing in disguise to have that change happen middle of the semester, so I can have someone a little bit more familiar.

Sipe: So, did you like living in LaFollette, or...?

Williams: I loved it. I actually lived in the dorm each of the years that I attended Ball State undergrad. I never ventured out and lived off-campus, I was always on-campus, for various reasons. One, because of the access to everything that was around me, so whether or not that was going to play basketball, if that was going to the library, having the food right there, having the friends right there. So I definitely loved my experiences in the dorms, specifically LaFollette. And actually still keep in touch with a majority of the people that I lived with.

[22:00]

Sipe: So, did you make friends easily here at college? You said you were trying to branch out and meet new people, so was that an easy thing for you?

Williams: It was easy from the standpoint that I think everyone from Michigan City made friends and then those friends became our friends. So, if I met two or three people, when it came time for us to eat dinner in LaFollette, or for us to go walk around and tour the campus those first couple of months, we could bring along an extra couple of people that I knew from the dorm and then my other Michigan City friends would bring a few other people that they had met from DeHority DeMotte, or from Noyer Complex. And so I think that helped us branch the number of friends we had here at campus early on.

Sipe: So your new friends you meeting, were they from classes or dorms or clubs?

[23:00]

Williams: It was mainly from classes, and I think that was one of the first years, and maybe Ball State did it earlier, but one of the first years that Ball State was really trying to key in on making sure that those core classes were being taken by the same people that lived on your floor or in your dorm. So I lived on second floor Woody/Shales, so I could go to geography class, and I would walk in that first day and there were five other people from the same floor that I lived on. So that gave you an opportunity to meet those people again, to build relationships with them, and then also that became your study group as well, because you could go right back to the second floor study lounge and you could work with those individuals. So a lot of it did come through the classes, but I was pretty social. Was not involved in any clubs or activities, for different reasons. And I think a lot of that had to do with me having a network of friends already, so once again, that's kind of the negative of having so many friends from the same city or town that you grew up in, is it kind of limits you to expanding, maybe the way you should when it comes to clubs. But then once again, there's the positive that's kind of hidden in there as well, so.

[24:00]

Sipe: So was this new friend group diverse?

Williams: It was diverse. The core friends that I had outside of the ones that were really from the town that I grew up in, one was from my hometown, he's still a best friend of mine. The other was from Camanche, Iowa. And then the other was from Gary, Indiana. And so the four of us didn't live in the same complex, we all lived in different complexes here at Ball State, but we were the best of friends. We're all still great friends today via social media, and then we see each other maybe once a summer as well with our families now that we've gotten older. But that was our core group and it just—it amazed us, because we all came from very diverse backgrounds, and so the stories that we would tell each other, and then we

would go visit each other in our hometowns as well. It just really was a pretty long-lasting friendship that I'm very proud of, so.

[25:00]

Sipe: Okay, so those first couple months at Ball State, what was your biggest struggle?

Williams: Academics. It's one of those where it's a lot different when you don't have that constant nudge on the back of "Hey you need to get this done," or "You need to manage your time better." So time management. Wasn't a lack of understanding what was going on in the classroom. It was the fact that you went to class maybe four or five hours a day, and realizing that there are still another nineteen hours in the day. And how do you budget that? How do you balance that? Do you balance that with going to the library and studying? Then you have your time that you're gonna be social with your friends. You have your time that you still wanna get out there and exercise and do things of that nature. So the first, not only couple of months, but the first year or so was very difficult with time management and making sure that everything was getting done.

[26:00]

Sipe: Okay, so you came to Ball State in August of 2001, right?

Williams: Yes.

Sipe: So about a month after you came here, the terrorist attacks, September 11, occurred. How did you react to that, and do you feel like you would have reacted differently had you still been at home?

Williams: If I still would have been at home, I can't necessarily say what my reaction would have been. At that point in time, I probably would have been up, just because my father always taught me the day is half done at nine o'clock, so we gotta get up and we gotta get things moving. But I do remember it vividly. Once again, Woody/Shales 222. And we were in the dorm and actually I woke up, and there were other people in the room. And they were watching that small little twelve inch TV we had on top of the dresser, and I kind of woke up, not really knowing what was going on.

[27:00]

And then everybody kind of filled me in, and so it was definitely one of those "Do you remember when?" and I remember vividly where I was at, in that room. I could walk into that room and tell you specifically where I stood. Probably could even name some of the people that were in the room with us as we were watching that. So it was definitely a very unfortunate moment in history, but I think it's something, along with other unfortunate moments, that, as a nation, all the way

down to individually, I think everybody found some type of strength that we could move on from that. But I definitely remember that.

Sipe: How did campus as a whole react to that event?

Williams: I pretty much remember everybody kind of staying to themselves. I didn't go to class that day, so I remember there were a lot of classes that were cancelled. Definitely very somber, and I think I probably did what the majority of everyone else did across the country when it happened, is we called home, or you called somebody.

[28:00]

You had to call a family member, you had to call a relative, mom, dad. And I'm pretty sure everybody had that first initial reaction of "Did you just see what happened?" So I think it was a sense of not panic, but a sense of concern as well, because if we have this happening on our own soil and territory, then I think everybody was kind of wondering "Can it happen again? Where's the next place it is going to happen? Is it going to a major city?" But that is something that during my time at Ball State, was always very aware of, what was going on around the world. Got that from my father. My father always collected magazines and newspaper articles of events that happened in history. And that is something I used to do as well. So I would always go out get the Daily News, or get the Muncie Star Press. So therefore, if there was something big that happened, I had that documentation of this point in history. So once again, we never forget what happened.

[29:00]

Sipe: Were there any patriotic demonstrations on campus in the weeks following that you remember?

Williams: That I cannot remember, no. Once again, I just remember that initial, everyone kind of coming together and obviously I remember the prayer circles. Because Ball State has always done a great job of that. I can definitely remember other incidences that have happened on campus from shootings of students, other tragic things that have happened to presidents, things like that where we've had those prayer circles and the campus come together and unite. Candlelight vigils, things like that.

Sipe: Okay, so back to just general college. How'd you pay for school?

Williams: Still paying for it now. Lot of, a lot of loans, taken out under, obviously, my parents name. Because once again they had that faith in me, that I would stay the course, and then that I would become a productive member of society and pay those loans off.

[30:00]

Didn't have a job when I was in college. And that's something that, I was very blessed, because I was pretty much the only person out of my core group of friends that did not have to really work. Just because my parents did pay that during the school year. And then I would work in summer. So I would work in the summer lots of hours so I could have that spending money. But my parents did take out those loans, and I'm proud to say I'm close to being done, but not all the way there.

Sipe: Did you have any scholarships or grants?

Williams: I did receive the Collier(?) Scholarship through the Teachers College. This was maybe my third year that I applied for that scholarship. But outside of that, no.

Sipe: Okay, so you said you worked during the summer.

Williams: I did.

Sipe: Where did you work?

[31:00]

Williams: Worked at a summer entrepreneur camp, through a program called HOPE, and that's an acronym for Helping Our People Excel. So it was a program for underprivileged youth, and so we would just come together and have a centralized location at a elementary school, and we would do different creative things. Such as run a clothing line, so teaching the kids how to make clothes and run that clothing line. We had a music store, so we were teaching students kind of the inner workings of how to—of the music industry. And then my specific job was I did the summer newspaper. It was actually—it was called the West Side Connection(?) because it was the west side of town. And so we had the different students, they researched over the summer, they wrote articles, we went out to local businesses and we said “You know what, this is an article that we have written, we would like to sell this at your—at your store. Can you do that for us?”

[32:00]

And then also at the end of the program, we put on a play, as well. So definitely was something that I'm very proud to say I was a part of. So that was one opportunity that I had (coughs). Excuse me, sorry. (clears throat) Another job that I had in the summer was I worked for NIPSCO [Northern Indiana Public Service Company], which was the NiSource Power Company in Northern Indiana. That was a very lucrative job, but it was a very hardworking job as well. Being able to drive all over LaPorte County, Lake County, Porter County, read meters, things

like that. So it was a job I took seriously, but it was a job that I—once I left, I had to say “You know what, I have to give them a lot of credit for what they do.” So those were just a couple of the different summer jobs that I had.

Sipe: So the NIPSCO job you said was in Michigan City?

Williams: It was in the Region. So it was out of Merrillville, Indiana which is a part of Lake County. So I had to kind of drive all across three different counties and read meters, read gas meters.

[33:00]

So it was very time-consuming for me. I didn’t have a lot of time for my friends that particular summer, but it definitely helped in contributing to some of the expenses of textbooks and things like when I came back to the university.

Sipe: Were you living in Michigan City and commuting to that job?

Williams: In the summer?

Sipe: Yes.

Williams: I always went back home and lived with my parents during the summer. So that was something that, it was a blessing to have that, so I didn’t have to worry about that extra expense in the summer. But once again, having that strong family dynamic, and then with my brother being in college in Illinois, it was a great meeting ground for my brother and I to come back and unite and spend that bonding time. For family to come, and then as much as I’ve talked about the Michigan City group here in Muncie, there were times when we really didn’t see each other, because as we kind of started to go further into our education at Ball State, we kind of did drift.

[34:00]

And it wasn’t because of the lack of love and appreciation, it was different majors. So there weren’t a lot that went into education. You had some that into nursing, some that went into law, and so that was also another way for us to come back and say “Hey, I know you. You’re in Muncie too, but what’s been going on the last couple of months?” So that was the reason why I lived at home.

Sipe: Okay, so you said you didn’t join any activities here at Ball State.

Williams: I did not.

Sipe: And why was that?

Williams: You know what, I think a lot of it just goes back to having friends already. And so I think at that stage in my life, I looked at it as “You know what, are these organizations just for the friendships?” Which it wasn’t. And I think if I could go back and do something differently, I would be more involved. Because that’s something that I think the further I got into the end of my undergrad, and definitely now, with my involvement with Ball State University as much as I can, I definitely see that value in it.

[35:00]

But once again, it’s—it has nothing to do with organizations. I’ve had many friends that were part of many different programs, many different things that helped change Ball State University from my first day as a freshman, up until when I graduated. But I think that was just maybe a personal choice of having the pocket of friends already.

Sipe: So you said if you could go back, you maybe might join some clubs?

Williams: Probably.

Sipe: Which ones might you join?

Williams: I would say the ones that stand out for me would be Black Student Association. Just because of that diversity, and being able to share those common experiences. I think any type of organization that focuses on diversity is an organization that not only that particular demographic, but all should be involved in. And I think that was the positive that I saw when I was here at Ball State.

[36:00]

Was that you had a lot of very different diverse organizations that weren’t just for African-Americans, they weren’t just for Hispanic Americans, they were for everybody. And so you could go to an event, which I attended some events, you could go to an event, and you would see all different colors, all different genders within those events. And so, my lack of being a part of an organization didn’t mean that Ball State wasn’t strong, and still is strong for that matter. But they were very strong with collaborating with the different organizations on campus, which was great to see.

Sipe: So, you said that you lived in LaFollette your freshman year, and then you stayed in the dorms. Did you stay in LaFollette specifically?

Williams: I went from LaFollette freshman year to Noyer my sophomore year and then I was in Shively. I was in Shively all for my third and fourth year and then my fifth year, I was out at the apartments right across from the football

stadium.

[37:00]

Which the name is slipping my memory right now...

Sipe: Scheidler? Or Anthony?

Williams: No, is it Anthony?

Sipe: That's what they're called now.

Williams: Yes, so that's where I was at for my fifth year here on campus.

Sipe: Okay, so those five years in the dorms, or in apartments, did you room with people that you knew?

Williams: I did. So the freshman year was with someone from West Lafayette, then my own buddy from Michigan City. My sophomore year, random story that goes with that. I actually checked in the night before, my roommate wasn't there. So then the next morning, I was getting ready, and my roommate came in, and I looked at him and he looked at me, and we just started laughing, because it was actually a person that I knew, that I actually went to Ball State orientation with.

[38:00]

Not from the same hometown, but we had both—we were in the same orientation group, so that was a blessing and he was my roommate my sophomore year. And then the last three years in university, I lived by myself. And that's for various reasons as well. One, a lot of the people that I was friends with that were my brother's age, they graduated at that point. So they had moved on to their families, they had moved on to their careers. Of the core people that I used to hang out with, some of them didn't make it. Some of them ended up going to community colleges back in the Region, some of them transferred to other universities. So there again, that goes back to the "If I could go back in time and become more involved in organizations" then my last three years I probably would have had another pocket of friends that I could have turned to and relied on versus those first two years when it was all just people from the town that I grew up in.

[39:00]

It's very true during orientation, when they tell you in that circle, when they say "Look to the left, and look to the right. Some of these people will not make it." Those words are very true. Some people didn't even make it to Labor Day. But then there are some people that, they didn't make it three, four years. So once again, building the largest pocket of true friends that you can is something that I

would urge all freshman as they're coming in to Ball State University to do.

Sipe: Okay, so while you were here at Ball State, how connected to Muncie did you feel?

Williams: Very connected. And I think that's the education part of it. So not necessarily as connected from an organizational standpoint, but everything I did from a service standpoint was through education. Our SVS, our voluntary services, I remember being a reading coach at Longfellow Elementary, and I enjoyed that which was a requisite, but I continue to do that. So I continue to be a reading coach.

[40:00]

And then being a part of Motivate Our Minds, I actually worked for Motivate Our Minds a couple of summers when I was still in college and then one time when I was actually teaching here in Muncie as well. So once again, I'm always staying connected, but I think that's key for Ball State, and that's something that they do really well, is staying connected to the city of Muncie. So it was really just a matter of finding an opportunity, finding something you want to do, and I guarantee Muncie has that already written in that affiliation with Ball State University. So if there's something you want to be involved in, whether or not it's education, giving back to the community through sports, through gardening, through entrepreneurship, you contact Ball State, they can keep you connected with Muncie.

Sipe: Did you find and Ball State more or less progressive than Michigan City where you grew up?

Williams: Two different types of towns. Michigan City was and is now definitely a tourist type town.

[41:00]

Since we have that location of forty-five minutes away from Chicago, so you're gonna get a lot of that traffic in Michigan City. But then you still have that heart and core of the people that have grown up in Michigan City. With Muncie, I didn't see it as a college town, but I think sometimes you're gonna get that dynamic from the minority, so there's gonna be a small percentage of the people that think Muncie is a college town, whereas I think that Muncie is a great town to live in, because this is where I chose to stay and live and have my family live. And it just so happens that we have an elite university in the town as well. So I don't see it as two separate entities. My family—I mean we enjoy walking to campus, all times of the year. And so it's not like we're going to Ball State University, it's "We're taking a walk in Muncie, on Ball State's campus." So I've always seen it as a unifying thing.

Sipe: Okay, so did you ever feel unsafe on campus for any reason?

[42:00]

Williams: I never felt unsafe. I know we had several instances during my time undergrad where there were some things that happened that may have led to, maybe students not feeling as safe. But no, I never felt that way, and I think that has a lot to do with building those relationships with the people in your dorm, building those relationships with the people that are in your classes as well. And so I don't there was anywhere that any student can go, and you didn't know somebody, at that point in time. Just because it was a pretty tight-knit group of people when I was here on campus those five years, and I'm sure it's still that same way today. But you couldn't go anywhere. You couldn't eat without seeing someone you knew, you couldn't go play a sport without seeing someone, you couldn't walk to class, walk back from class, without seeing someone. So I think the more you get to know people, the more safe that you become.

Sipe: Okay so, elementary education majors have to take a lot of different classes in a lot of different subjects. So what were some of your favorite classes you took?

[43:00]

Williams: Outside of elementary education?

Sipe: In elementary education or outside.

Williams: Once again, going back to the people, every single course had some type of benefit. But I think just the people that taught it, and I'm not gonna mention names, because I'm gonna forget someone, so I'm not even gonna start that list. Outside of education, loved astronomy. Once again, because that kind of broadened me on a different wavelength of things that I wanted to do. But definitely, every single—Elementary Education 100, giving you that introduction of “Hey, do you really want to do this? Here's the reality behind being an educator.” And taking that course and realizing, “Hey, I really do want to do this, because this professor presented it in a great way.” Art class. Art class is something that we had to take as an educator.

[44:00]

That was a class that was a defining moment for me, because that was a teacher that gave me a second chance, on me being tardy with a couple of different assignments. And I remember she posed the question to me that I still remember and she pretty much told me “What are you waiting for?” And for her to say that to me, kind of woke me up a little bit. Had the same question posed to me that same semester by children's literature teacher, which I actually still stay in contact with. And she kind of gave me that same thing of “You have a lot of

potential. I don't know what you're waiting on." So that was that transition between my second year and third year. So those were just a couple of the teachers that took me from not having that time management the first couple of years to finishing out on Dean's List the rest of the time that I was here.

Sipe: Okay, so you went from getting not-so-good grades to getting pretty good grades?

Williams: Not so good would be an understatement. And that's just a part of the reality of, sometimes I think you have to experience things in order to tell somebody else maybe the right way to go.

[45:00]

And so now, I can wholeheartedly look at a student in the face and say "You know what, I remember those days where I struggled. It wasn't elementary. It wasn't necessarily junior high or high school, it was my first couple years of college. But I had to turn it around. And how I turned it around was having a support system. So you have to find someone: family, friends, teachers, that you can rely on, that you can go and say "Can you help me?" And there's always gonna be someone there to kind of help you turn it around.

Sipe: Okay, so campus changed a lot while you were here, correct?

Williams: It did.

Sipe: They built a lot of new buildings. I know the Arts and Journalism Building and the Ball Tower both finished construction in 2001. So what were your favorite new buildings, or did you think all the construction was silly and annoying?

[46:00]

Williams: No, never annoying. Because that's something that I still take pride in today, is—I make a joke with people and I say "You know what, you see that brick on that new building? I paid for that brick." It could be something really, really small, but just having that vested interest in a university and seeing it progress, from even 2001 until 2015 now. But I think a lot of that goes back to the history of Ball State University, and the appreciation of Ball State University. So having a father that attended the university and was very dedicated and always coming down, I was able to see the progression a lot more than just my friends that came here in 2001. So I've seen the progression of the Alumni Center, and things like that as well. Or not only Ball State University, but the city as a whole. So I could drive around town with my father, and my father could say "You know what, I remember when there was nothing down McGalliard, there was never even a mall down that way." So then I had to visualize "Wow, this city has really come a lot in the last thirty, forty years, to the standpoint that there were roads that weren't even here anymore.

[47:00]

“Or the fact that they used to play their football games at a totally different location than the luxury stadium that they play in now.” So I think I do have that appreciation of how it’s changed, but even more so knowing that my father was able to kind of tell me what it was like for campus when he was here. And then also, have to credit to the History Department as well. I mean, documenting and having photos, having interviews of what the campus used to be like, and how it is now. Just being able to sit that photo down on the table, and show it to an incoming student, they have to take appreciation for the university that they attend.

Sipe: All right, so when you—you said you had quite a few friends when you were here. What kind of things would you do with your friends on campus?

Williams: I mean, a lot of for me, since I was kind of a recovering basketball player, who didn’t go to college to play basketball, it was focused around sports.

[48:00]

So if it was not us playing sports, we were always attending some type of activity as well. At that point in time, not to say that a lot of our major sports teams won’t come back to prominence, but at that point in time, we had a pretty good basketball team, so we rallied around that. We had a pretty good football team, so that’s where we were at every Saturday. Didn’t have as many midweek games as we do now, a lot of our games were just on Saturdays. So those were a lot of the things that we used to do. Lot of focus on academics, and I think that’s something that’s undervalued and underappreciated, and I would tell a lot of freshmen, incoming students is “Yes it’s okay to be social. Yes it’s okay to have a good time in college. But those same people that are being social and having a good time, they’re pulling their grades too.” And it took me about a year to realize that, that the same people that are going out and they’re eating in AJ with their friends, and they’re playing basketball four hours a night.

[49:00]

I’m thinking “Wow, they’re not getting their work done.” But they are. And they’re on Dean’s List. So it’s that balance of “Yes, we need to be social, but yes, we need to know that we’re here for a purpose. And keep it academic as well.” Gotta balance.

Sipe: (coughs) Okay, so it took you five years to finish your undergrad.

Williams: It did.

Sipe: Why was that?

Williams: A lot of that was me wanting to re-right some of the wrongs, from an academic standpoint. So there were some classes that I didn't do particularly well in, that I went back and I retook them. Because one, I wanted to re—you know, kind of boost my GPA. But also I wanted to kind of challenge myself in saying, "You know what, I didn't give it 100% when I took it as a freshman, and I need to take it again because this is gonna come in handy, later on in life. There's a reason why I have these classes on my schedule." I've always been very purposeful with my classwork, undergrad or graduate, because I know it's gonna serve a purpose.

[50:00]

So there were at least a good three classes that I can remember off the top of my head that I took over again, even some in the summertime. But I think that helped me in the long run, being on the five year plan, and then also I think it helped me really, really focus academically. Like I said I was—I earned the Dean's List the last three years that I was in school, and I think it was good for me to finish strong to have that momentum as I was looking at the real world, staring at my face after I graduated, so.

Sipe: Okay, so you said—you named a couple of your favorite classes. Did you have any mentors that you could point out, and if so were they teachers or...?

Williams: Yeah, I had quite a few mentors. Dr. Rice, Dr. Peggy Rice, she was the professor of the children's literature class that I took.

[51:00]

And once again, she is always been someone that I've tried to stay in touch with on a monthly, maybe yearly basis, just to kind of see how things are going. Miss Huffman. Mrs. Huffman is the kindergarten teacher at Burris Elementary, I don't know if she's still there or not, but I had a couple of practicum experiences there. So I was able to kind of reach out to her several different times. Dixie Denton, she was my EdEl 100 professor. Still able to reach out to her. Wow, there are so many. I mean I could go on and on. If we're stepping out of the professor stage, which I apologize if there are any professors I did not name, now we're look at people like Mr. Ed Shipley. Mr. Ed Shipley and my father are close friends. So once again, if we're thinking about Ball State University, if we're thinking about the Alumni Center, I mean the first name that always comes to mind is Ed Shipley.

[52:00]

So he has always been supportive of not only myself, but of my family, of my father, a great family relationship there. I think there's too many to name, because

I think it's whether or not it's through the Black Alumni, whether or not it's through just the Alumni Council, there are many faces that every time they were on campus and they saw me, they always welcome me. So if they were here once a year, if they were here a dozen times a year, they're just those faces that you associate with Ball State, and I've been blessed, you know, that the time that I came through was the perfect time for me and my life. But if you asked me that question again, I could probably name another ten to twelve, there's a lot.

Sipe: Would you say those mentors helped you grow academically, emotionally...?

Williams: Everything. I mean, for lack of an extended response, when I was here at Ball State University, it wasn't "Education Redefined" it was "Ball State University: Everything you need." That was the slogan when I was here.

[53:00]

And so honestly, it really was everything. It was the academic push that you needed, because Ball State has always been an elite university academically. And over the years I can see that we've continued to raise that expectation. And I hate when people say "Raise the bar." Cause when people say "raise the bar," that almost makes it seem like you don't want people to attend the university, and I love using that "raise the expectation," because it's like anybody can attend this university, but you just have to meet that expectation to attend. So I'm always proud that Ball State is continuing to do that. But it's a social thing as well. It's an emotional thing. I can probably call at least five people right now and ask them "What was something that was key to you becoming the man or woman that are?" And in their top five, they'll say Ball State University. I wouldn't be where I am today without Ball State.

[54:00]

So that's why I'm forever grateful to the experiences that I've had, the people that I've met, the people that have encouraged me. And that's why I can continue to give back to Ball State.

Sipe: Okay, so if you're any kind of education major, you have to finish a semester of student teaching.

Williams: Yes.

Sipe: Where'd you do your student teaching?

Williams: My student teaching was at Grissom Elementary School in Muncie. So it's on the south side of town. Was able to work with a male teacher, who was actually retiring at that point, so he taught me a lot about old-school education. A lot about setting expectations and then at the same point, encouraging your students to meet

those expectations. So, very appreciative of that experience. Loved that I could do it here in Muncie, because at that point in time, I was starting to kind of have to pick “Where do I want to move? Do I want to stay here? Do I want to go somewhere else?” So it just so happened that that was a good way for me to kind of get my foot in the door, through student teaching.

[55:00]

Sipe: Okay, so—and what grade level was that?

Williams: This was fifth grade. It was fifth grade. Those students graduated two years ago. Actually still keep in touch with one of them. And this particular individual is the person that I would say was my success, my success story. And I think everybody always says “If you can go in and you can help change, or help guide, at least one person, then it’s worth it.” And she was definitely a person that it took the encouragement, she took the advice and she is pretty successful for herself. So it was—it’s definitely something that makes you feel old, knowing that the students that you used to teach are now graduating high school, and they’re moving on. But it’s also a pride in that as well.

Sipe: And how much choice did you get about what grade level you student taught or where you student taught?

[56:00]

Williams: We had a little bit of choice, not with necessarily where. We kind of gave our different options if we wanted to be the city or the county, things like that. The grade level, we just kind of gave our preferences, and so my preference was upper elementary. Just because I didn’t know if I could tie the shoes and then the runny noses with kindergarten. Which those were all stereotypes. Now that I’m in education, I realize that there are some kindergarten students that can do above and beyond what you ever thought kindergarten students can do. But at that point in time, I was thinking “Let’s just kind of take the third, fourth, fifth grade level, and let’s see what we can do there.”

Sipe: Okay so—and why did you choose Muncie or Delaware County?

Williams: One, because I kind of had those experiences through reading coaches, through Motivate Our Minds. So I knew I wanted to work with the lower SES [Socio-Economic Status] status of students, and so that was kind of my niche, and I wanted to stay in that area. And since you asked that question, there’s another person that I omitted when I was talking about professors.

57:00]

Dr. Joyce Jamerson. I cannot finish the interview without mentioning her. She

was my university supervisor when I student taught. Phenomenal. Very encouraging. Not only for me being an African-American male, but just an educator in general, that cares about students. So I definitely appreciate all that she has done for me, for the university, for herself. She is the definition of an entrepreneur, so Dr. Jamerson, Mrs. J, have to give her a lot of credit as well.

Sipe: All right, you mentioned in there that you wanted to work with students of lower socioeconomic status.

Williams: Yes.

Sipe: Why did you make that decision?

[58:00]

Williams: I think that's the conversation of equity vs. equality and I think as you take classes, as you experience things with your own eyes, you realize that they're different, and people use them synonymously and they're not supposed to be used that way. So there are certain schools, regardless of whatever city that you're in, that there's an equity issue. So things may be given, resources, finances too, various places, but it doesn't always mean that's it equitable. And so, I just thought, If I can share some of the background of how I grew up, which—still I was very, very blessed, the way that I grew up, and it still was not the life that some of my friends had growing up. But I can always look a student in the face and say "I understand what you're going through." I never tell anybody "I know what you're going through," because I don't. I can understand it, because I lived in a neighborhood that was like that. I have friends that were like that, but these are things that you can overcome. And once again, if you can just share that message and genuinely mean it, definitely goes a long way with students.

[59:00]

Sipe: Did you student teach your last semester at Ball State?

Williams: I student taught the first semester. So I came in in the fall, and then I took a few more classes, and then that's when I graduated, in May. So there's pros and cons to student teaching in the fall. One, you get to be there from the beginning. So when the students meet the teacher for the first time, they meet the student teacher for the first time. Which is a strong positive versus coming in in the spring and having to learn what's happened in the first six months and finish the rest of the school year. So I enjoyed it that way, but I don't know if they do it that way, one hundred percent of the time anymore, so.

Sipe: So you graduated in May of 2006?

Williams: May 6, I think. May 6, 2006.

Sipe: Okay, so were you excited for graduation or nervous? Did you feel ready?

[1:00:00]

Williams: I was excited, I was excited. Five years. Well spent, but there's just something about walking—walking across that stage, and having people there that you love support you. Having those phone calls leading up to you walking across the stage. Having those phone calls after. So it's an accomplishment, but it's an accomplishment that's bigger than something individual. It represents my entire family. And then also to know that I am the second graduate of Ball State University following in my father's footsteps, that's also a proud moment as well to be able to, when the ceremony's done, go up and get that handshake, get that hug and to know that you've accomplished that is pretty special.

Sipe: So you were excited to graduate, but were you a little nervous too, to go out and enter the real world?

[1:01:00]

Williams: Not necessarily. If you were to ask me then, I probably would have said I was nervous, but looking back on it, it's one of those where I think students are maybe nervous if they don't feel as if they're prepared. But with Ball State and the major that I had, I was prepared. I mean I can look at my transcript right now and I could run through every single class, and I can tell you how I've used each one of those classes in my nine years of education up to this point. Children's literature, dealing with parents, psychology of teachers. (coughs) It all pays off. (clears throat) Sorry. And I wasn't getting emotional. Just a little sick.

Sipe: Okay so your first job out of college. Where was that?

[1:02:00]

Williams: Here in Muncie. I was actually living in Scheidler, Scheidler Apartments. And I had just finished with the teacher fair at Worthen Arena, and I was debating where I wanted to start my career. And at that point in time, obviously with me being a male, and with me being an African-American male, I had a lot of different cities, a lot of different corporations that were potentially wanting to hire me. And so I had to make that decision: "Do I move? Do I move to Charlotte, North Carolina? Do I move to Arizona? Do I move to Atlanta? Do I stay local? Muncie, Anderson?" I already had that Muncie connection and in my heart I wanted to stay in Muncie because this is once again, always been my second home, so I wanted to stay here. And I was just getting ready to make a decision of going somewhere outside of Muncie, and the assistant superintendent, Steve Edwards, gave me a phone call, and said "Hey can you come in for an interview tomorrow, for Muncie Community Schools?" And I said "I can." And the rest was

kind of history. Went in, had a pretty good interview and stayed here in Muncie.

[1:03:00]

Sipe: And you were teaching elementary school?

Williams: Yes, I taught third grade for three years at Northview Elementary, here in Muncie. At that point in time, there was a school that opened up (coughs) called East Washington Academy. East Washington Academy was a blend of the dynamics of the old Washington Carver Elementary School, which was downtown, and also the high-ability population of students that came from Storer Elementary. They combined that to reopen this school and they called it East Washington Academy. So I was able to interview, and they pretty much hand picked the staff to come to this new school. And so I was a teacher there for three years. I taught third grade, fourth grade, split classes as well. So I definitely enjoyed my six years here in Muncie teaching.

Sipe: So did you stay at that one school for your whole time teaching at Muncie?

Williams: I was at Northview for three years, and then I was at East Washington Academy for three years.

[1:04:00]

Sipe: Okay.

Williams: Just teaching multiple grades, upper elementary. Also doing some coaching as well. I think I coached it all. Coached volleyball, I've coached flag football, I've coached basketball. Was blessed to win a couple of city championships in there with some very talented young men and some very talented young women. So once again, only taught six years here in Muncie, yes.

Sipe: Okay, so you got your master's during that same time, correct?

Williams: I did.

Sipe: Were you doing that online?

Williams: I was. I did it online. After my first year of teaching, I decided that I wanted to eventually become a building principle one day. So I just said I'm just going to take classes for the next six, seven years. Kind of balance it out so I'm not overwhelming myself, I can still devote my time to my students, my family, and then also coaching as well. And so every semester I would take a class, or take two.

[1:05:00]

So I didn't have a particular cohort of students that I was with throughout the...maybe eight years, or so that I was taking those classes. I'm sorry, six years. But it was something that definitely paid off, because I didn't have to take out any loans for, I could pay it off right away. So I'm just paying on my undergrad, but as I was taking graduate, I was paying it as I was taking it, course by course. But it definitely helped. Had a lot of very supportive graduate professors as well, that helped me along the way. A couple that I've actually just talked to this week, about potentially starting my doctorate. So, it's not gonna end. Lifelong learning, and if I can do that through Ball State University, which is my 100% intent to do, I'll always kind of have that connection with Ball State and taking classes, so.

Sipe: All right, so you said you went and got your master's because you decided you wanted to be a principal.

Williams: Yes.

[1:06:00]

Sipe: Why'd you decide that?

Williams: I think it's a combination of two different things. One, you have people kind of talking in your ear saying "You know what, I think you'd be a good building leader." But then also at the same time, when I was teaching, I was that teacher that I was always more concerned with everybody in the building and not just my twenty, thirty kids. So yes, I did everything I could for my twenty or thirty kids, but if I saw a kid in the hallway, it was kind of like I had to talk to that kid and figure out what was going on with that student. And when I coached, I had different kids in different classes, so I would always follow with the teachers to make sure that their grades were above average, so that they could continue. So I think I've just always had that global look at an elementary school, instead of maybe just that focus on one particular classroom. So I think those two things combined is what kind of pushed me in that direction to be an administrator.

Sipe: Okay, so you worked six years for Muncie Community Schools?

[1:07:00]

Williams: I did.

Sipe: And then you got your first administrative job, right?

Williams: I did.

Sipe: And where was that?

Williams: That was in Marion, Indiana. Through Marion Community Schools. So I taught for six years, and I just thought, You know what, I think this is a good opportunity for me to start looking for an administrative position. So I reached out to the same person that hired me in Muncie, he was now the superintendent in Marion Community Schools. So I reached out to Mr. Steve Edwards, and I said "I saw this position posted, can I come interview? I think I'm ready." And so I went up and interviewed in Marion, and I was hired as an assistant principal at the intermediate school, which is grades five and six in Marion, Indiana. It was a failing school. So I came in with a brand new leadership team. So we had a new principal. She was coming from Indianapolis Public Schools.

[1:08:00]

And so we were kind of charged with turning that school around, making sure that the culture and the climate of that building was established so that teachers could get back to their passion of teaching and students could get back to their passion of learning. So I was there for one year before I moved on to become a principal. But proud to say that I was a part of the foundation that that school is now just a couple points away from being an A school, so.

Sipe: Can you tell me a bit—like, demographically about Marion, Indiana?

Williams: It is, just within the last couple of months, there was some stats that came out that Grant County actually has the highest poverty rate in the state of Indiana from a county standpoint. The school that I am currently at, we have ninety-four percent of our students free and reduced lunch. Ninety-one percent poverty with the school that I am currently the building leader at. Demographic wise, we are looking at maybe forty-five percent Caucasian, fifteen percent African-American, fifteen percent Hispanic, fifteen percent multi-racial.

[1:09:00]

So once again, very diverse, which is kind of every single spot that I've been in from a teaching standpoint, was diverse. Every single job that I've had, you know, in the summer has been diverse. So once again, that's something that I would tell to the freshmen coming in, make sure that you're being strategic with the jobs that you have and the things that you become a part of because it's all a building block, and it's preparing you for something later, so.

Sipe: So you were an assistant principal for a year.

Williams: For a year.

Sipe: And then you became a principal.

Williams: Yes, in Marion, Indiana. Allen Elementary School. So that's where I've been the

last two years. So once again, taking leadership of an F school, that's something that I was familiar with from my assistant principal time. Something that I'm also familiar with from a challenge standpoint. From my coaching, from my competitive nature. There's only one way to go but up. So we took that challenge on with a great staff, great parents, great students.

[1:10:00]

We're making progress. We're a D school right now, but I told my staff when we went from an F to a D, we actually went from an H to a D. Because if you look at our scores, they weren't an F, they were way below an F. So it's about progression. I'm very excited about this year, to see where we're gonna be at the end of all the assessment windows. But once again, it's about culture and I don't want it to make it seem like it's all about academics because it's broader than that. It's about students. It's about their emotional wellbeing. It's about their social wellbeing. It's about understanding and caring about families, which is what we do. And then the academics part is just a piece of it, to just kind of show that those things from a climate culture standpoint are in place.

Sipe: So what would you say has been your most rewarding job so far?

[1:11:00]

Williams: I don't know if you can say I've had one. And if I do have to pick one, I'm probably have to step out of education and I'm gonna have to go with the whole family. The role of being a son, a brother, a husband, a father. That's gonna trump everything. And that comes from the leadership that I've had. Mr. Scott Blakely, he was my principal the three years I taught at Northview, my principal the three years I taught at East Washington Academy. Still a great friend. Best friend actually. And he told me when I first started teaching, he said "You have to make sure you prioritize." He said "It's God, family, wife, son, school." And he says "With the family part, you can mix that in, if you wanna put family, wife son all together that's fine. But just make sure that God always comes first, and make sure that school always comes after your family and God."

[1:12:00]

So that's why I would say that's probably my most difficult job on a daily basis, is the family. And it's the most rewarding. But if we're looking at it strictly educational, that's just gonna be tough. Because I think everything has prepared me for the next step. So even right now, the position that I'm currently in, and I love it, and if I'm there for the next twenty, thirty years, that will be a blessing. But that may even be preparing me for something that I don't even know yet, so.

Sipe: All right, so tell me about your wife. What's her name?

Williams: Her name is Courtney Williams.

Sipe: And when did you marry her?

Williams: Married her—(laughs) We always joke about this. I married her February 18, 2013.

Sipe: And how did you meet her?

[1:13:00]

Williams: I met her—she was actually a student teacher my first year of teaching. So my first year of teaching in Muncie, she was a student teacher. And so I remember just having conversations with my boss, just kind of saying “You know what, this is a great crop of student teachers that are here, they’re really, really all solid teachers.” And he kind of knew, at that point in time. He says “You know what, when she gets done student teaching, he’s probably gonna end up—you know—asking her out on a date.” And that’s what happened. She student taught in the fall, and come that spring, she came back to the school for something. And then I ended up asking her out, and then that progression kind of led to us getting married years later.

Sipe: So she was student teaching in Muncie?

Williams: She was.

Sipe: Did she go to Ball State?

Williams: She did. She graduated—I’m bad with dates. Maybe a year after me. So I was ’06, I think she was maybe ’07. But I had not known her at that point in time. And that’s just because of the different pockets of friends that I had when I was in college and the fact that I was there for five years, plus in the summer. I didn’t necessarily know those people that were coming behind me in education, so.

[1:14:00]

Sipe: So she’s also a teacher?

Williams: She is. She actually teaches at East Washington Academy, the school where I used to teach. Before that she taught in New Castle. Before that she taught in Atlanta for three years as well. So she actually graduated, moved to Atlanta, taught in Atlanta, then came back up this way.

Sipe: So she also teaches elementary school?

Williams: She does. She does.

Sipe: Okay, and you have a child together.

Williams: We do.

Sipe: And—name, birthday?

Williams: His name is Avery Lee Williams. Middle name the same as my father's middle name Lee. He just turned two back on the twenty-fifth of February. So he's a little over two. And he keeps us going. So he's gonna be, hopefully, the next in the legacy of a Williams man that will be attending Ball State University.

[1:15:00]

But just like my father, and as he raised me, it's gonna be about expectations of being a lifelong learner. And if that propels you to go into the direction of Ball State University, great. But if not, continue learning, because that's what it's all gonna be about. But we'll make sure that he has some cardinal and white, so.

Sipe: Okay, so you work in Marion, but you still live here in Muncie.

Williams: I do.

Sipe: Why—why'd you make that choice to stay in Muncie?

Williams: It's just—it's home. You know, and it's always been home ever since I was a kid growing up in elementary school, even before that. And so, I really can't see myself living anywhere else at this point in time. I've been known to tell many people that there are only two places that I may live in my entire life and they are Michigan City and Muncie, and I'm ok with that. More than ok with that. I'm not a big city guy. I can visit big cities but I don't want to live in a big city. I don't want the commute.

[1:16:00]

I just want—not a small town, just a medium size town. But some things to offer. Which Muncie does have to offer. We were actually talking about that a little before the interview, about the centralization between Chicago, Cincinnati and Indianapolis. So if there's somewhere you need to go, you can get there relatively easy. But once again, I love Muncie. I owe a lot to Muncie and Ball State University from an educational standpoint, from starting of my career, where I met my wife, where my son was born. So once again, Muncie is home. Another thing that we used to joke about in college, and we never got this trademarked, so if someone takes this idea, this came from me and some of my friends. Is we were thinking about coming up with this shirt that says "There's always a little MC in

Muncie.” Because Michigan City, we just called it MC. You know, “We’re from the MC.”

[1:17:00]

And so, since there’s always that Muncie, Michigan City connection, we were gonna create that shirt because it’s like a pipeline. You’re always gonna get Michigan City High School graduates coming to Ball State, preferably for the education, Teachers College part of it. So that might still be a t-shirt that we have to create, so.

Sipe: So how far is that drive from your home in Muncie to your school in Marion?

Williams: Maybe 45 minutes. It’s not too far. And even with that, 45 minutes is pros and cons. The positive is it’s good reflection time. So it kind of gets you prepared for what you have to do throughout the course of the next ten, eleven, sometimes twelve hours in a day. And then also it gives you that time to unwind. Because when I come home, it’s not about school. When I come home, it’s about wife, and it’s about my son. So that comes first and foremost. Leave school at school. The negative about that is it’s kind of tough to immerse yourself with the extracurricular things that go on in the community when you live 45 minutes away.

[1:18:00]

So there’s certain programs that it’s tough to attend. Just kind of going back to the Martin Luther King Day celebrations. It’s bigger than just what happens during the school day. I mean our churches in Marion are so devoted. I mean, there were different things happening on Sundays that I wish I could have gone back to Marion to experience. Or do things at Indiana Wesleyan University, which is a big partner in Marion, Indiana. So that’s the downfall, is not being able to do those things after hours.

Sipe: Do you think you’d eventually want to work closer to Muncie?

Williams: Depends on who’s watching this video right now, this interview. It depends on wherever God takes me. I think Muncie’s gonna be our home for a long time. We’re actually in the process of selling our home, and we actually have already purchased a home that is still in the Muncie area.

[1:19:00]

So I do see us for the immediate and near distant future to stay around this area. So it’s difficult to immerse yourself when you’re not in the community, but it’s not impossible. So I am very much devoted to Marion, Indiana and the students and the parents of Marion. And actually I’ve kind of, not distanced myself from

Muncie, but it's just a little bit less likely for me to attend events in Muncie. But I think the positive of working in two different cities is I have all these different students that I've had the opportunity to either teach or be a leader for, or all these different teachers. So I love going out in the community in Muncie and Marion and seeing former students. Seeing parents of former students, and just kind of sharing in "Okay, what are those successes? What's going on now with your son, your daughter? How's your mom doing, how's your dad doing?" So I'm just kind of broadening my range of people that I can hopefully effect in life.

[1:20:00]

Sipe: So you said your commute's about forty-five minutes.

Williams: Forty-five.

Sipe: And that's okay.

Williams: It is.

Sipe: But what would be too far?

Williams: I don't know if there would be a too far, maybe an hour if we're talking from a time standpoint. But I don't think it would be too far if it's the right situation. If it's the right school, the right situation, then nothing's too far. So I mean, if there was a school back when I was coming out of college if I wanted to stay in Muncie and there was a school in IPS [Indianapolis Public Schools] that was really devoted that could help me grow, and I could help that school grow, then nothing's gonna be too far. And the reason why I can say that is because we can walk up and down campus, and we can take a poll on how many professors at Ball State are successful that don't live in Muncie, that they commute on a daily basis. And I think their bosses, or whoever is above them would say as long as you're getting the job done, that's all that matters.

[1:21:00]

Sipe: All the schools you've worked at have been public schools. Have you ever even thought about teaching in a private school or looked into that?

Williams: Not necessarily. But I think it's less about the debate of private and public and charter, and it's more about where do you think you can best help students. And it just so happens that in my nine years of education, I feel as if my best place to help students is in the public setting. So I have a lot of respect for those that work in charter schools, a lot of respect for those that work in private schools. Because all of our challenges are different. So the challenges of those that work in the private school are different than public schools. Not comparing saying one is greater than the other, it's just a different challenge on a day to day basis. And I

think more people need to realize that, instead of having the debate of public versus private, and public versus charter, is realizing it's about students, period.

Sipe: So you'd say you see yourself staying in public education?

[1:22:00]

Williams: I see myself staying where the need is for students.

Sipe: Okay, so your son, do you see him going to private school or public school or? Have you thought about this yet?

Williams: I see my son attending a school that is very diverse culturally, very diverse economically, and provides him with opportunities that probably go above and beyond what my wife and I can give him. And I think that's a part of the challenge that my parents had, is they're both college educated, and so how can we broaden the horizon of what we can experience myself and my brother in, knowing that we're gonna give them a lot already. So my wife and I, with the experience that we've had. I mean my wife, she did her student teaching abroad, so she's been out of the country. So she has that experience, and I have some as well, so being able to find a school that's going to take that from my son and then also still increase the expectation. So that's the school that he'll attend.

[1:23:00]

Sipe: Do you and your wife plan on having more children?

Williams: Did my wife want you to ask that?

Sipe: No.

Williams: No, okay. It could be in the future. It's one of those where right now, having a child, it's a lot. And it has nothing to do with finances, has nothing to do with the things that you have to buy. It has everything to do with time, and attention. Because if you're gonna do anything from a career standpoint to the best of your ability, it's gonna take time. So the fact that I want to be the best leader that I can be, the fact that my wife wants to be the best teacher that she can be, that takes time. Then when we leave those behind, at five, six, maybe seven o'clock at night, then we have to make time for each other, as husband and wife. Then we have to make time for our son. So I think, if we can get to that point where we feel 100% comfortable in having another child, I think we'll do that. But I think once you get past one, you kind of have to be really strategic and really really plan for having two sets of eyes that are on you at all times of the day.

[1:24:00]

Sipe: Okay, so you said that both the schools in Marion you came to were F schools. And a lot of urban schools are failing. Why do you think some of the reasons for that?

Williams: That's a tough question. Let me start with saying, I've said that they were both F schools to you right now. That's probably only the fourth or fifth time that I've actually referenced those schools as being F schools. Because I remember when I was an assistant principal, the principal and I, we walked in and we looked at the staff and we said "This is not an F school. These aren't F students, these aren't F teachers, we don't have F parents." When I was blessed to be the leader of the school that I'm at now, Allen Elementary in Marion, same thing.

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I said "We're not an F school. You guys are not F teachers, and these are not F students and F teachers." And I have not referenced it at any other point the rest of the school year because they don't need to hear that. Also what I think that does—and I'm gonna have you re-ask your question again in a second here. Actually what I think that does is it puts a stereotype, a negative connotation, when you continue to refer to underachieving schools as underachieving. Heard a piece of advice from Doctor Al Long(?). He is currently a mentor to some of the administrators in Marion Community Schools. And he says "I am tired of people calling students and schools 'at-risk.'" He says they should call them "at-opportunity." He says we don't need to tell a student that they're at-risk, they already know they're at risk. So we don't need to tell an underachieving school that they're underachieving, they already know that. So it goes back to what resources are you going to put into that school in order for that school not to be underachieving anymore.

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That's where that debate of equality and equity come into play. So if we're talking strictly financial, if you're giving a school that is overachieving and underachieving the same amount of money, you're giving them equal money, but that's not equitable. At some point you're gonna have to look at the underachieving schools and say "You know what, maybe they do need more resources." And that is something that I've been blessed with in the two schools in Marion that I've been at, we do have a school improvement grant from the state of Indiana. The Department of Education has been phenomenal in working with us and what they work with us on is not just giving us human resources or financial resources, but it's about sustainability. And a lot of times we think we can just give underachieving schools money or give them something extra than what they have, and it's not about that.

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It's about what are they gonna do when the money is gone? How do they sustain that success or that minimal growth or excessive growth? So I think that is how we tackle underachieving schools is you start with giving them some resources, but also you put a plan in place for them to sustain it for years and years after the resources are gone. I don't know if that answered your question or not.

Sipe: I think so.

Williams: Okay.

Sipe: Okay, so since you've graduated, you've stayed involved with Ball State. You were a member of the Teachers College Alumni Board. Why did you choose to stay involved?

Williams: It's something that I'm not even near as involved as I should be. And I think as I get older I start to realize that impact more and more. And I think it started with maybe my junior year, or my third year undergrad, as I started to really realize, You know what, Ball State has given a lot to me, and I need to give something back to Ball State, whether that is time, or finance, whatever it is. Just to show that appreciation. So I think that's the reason why I stay involved.

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But mainly, I like to learn. And Ball State has many opportunities where you can put yourself in a position to be around people that are doing the exact same thing that you're doing, and they're successful at it. So from the Teachers College Alumni standpoint, to be on that board as a first, second year teacher, and to sit around the table with accomplished superintendents and teachers. I mean, not to leave anybody out, but we're talking about Gwen Adel from Gary, Indiana, Wendy Robinson Fort Wayne Community Schools, Dr. Eugene White Indianapolis Public Schools, and just to kind of take in the conversations that were happening about education and the direction of education, that in itself, that's invaluable.

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Sipe: Okay, so let's talk about the so-called crisis facing African-American males. They're incarcerated at much higher rates than white males. Recently in the news there have been some police shootings. What are some of your thoughts on that?

Williams: A lot of that is—my thoughts go back to community. My dad used to always say, and I know that it's something out of many I've always said, is "It takes a village." And that is indeed true. It can't just be a best friend, it can't just be a mom, it can't just be a dad, it can't just be a teacher. It takes every single person in their process of them aging, through their education, to help guide them along the way. I'm not one of those that—I don't critique what's gone wrong. I'm one

of those that when situations like that happen, let's not have it happen again. And that's something that I try to ingrain in the students that I see every single day is "I make mistakes every single day. But I don't make the same mistake tomorrow that I did today."

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You have to learn. And that goes for everybody involved, whether or not it's the individual, the person that's committing, every single person involved. You have to take some type of responsibility for what is happening. I go back to my father and some of the things that he used to talk to me about, that I think is missing nowadays. And it's the concept of "I may be going down the wrong path, but I'm not gonna let you go down the wrong path." And my generation I think may be the last generation to embrace that, where I had friends that were making some very very poor decisions in elementary and junior high. But they knew I was a straight and narrow guy. So what they did was they kinda helped protect me, and they said, No leave him alone. I don't want you messing with him. That's Anthony, he's cool. He's okay. Or, Yeah, he doesn't do that. He doesn't get involved in that.

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And I think today what you have happen is you have people that are wanting to get everybody involved in some maybe less than stellar choices. So I think that's a part of it. I think another part of it—so that would be my community response of what we need to do. I think if we're looking from a bigger response, from a national or from a government standpoint, I think people need to step back and realize that we're not as far along as we think we are. Yes there's been some dramatic things that have happened from the sixties. There are some great great accomplishments from people of all races, all genders. But I think sometimes people wanna jump and say everything's okay. And I think it's about reflection, and realizing we're not there yet. There are still some things that we all can do better, regardless of race, regardless of gender, so let's not act like everything is okay.

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So when we have different things that have happened in history, we talked recently about Ferguson, Missouri, we gotta step back and we gotta reflect and say "One, are we where we should be? Two, if not, how can we progress?" And I think that's the way I try to look at everything, I think that's just my fatherly, paternal instinct, and I think that's just my building leader instinct, is there are many unfortunate things that happen. We have to acknowledge that they happened, first of all. And sometimes you have people that don't want to acknowledge that things happen that are wrong. That's the first thing that needs to happen, you have to actually step out and say "What happened is wrong." Then

reflect on it and say “How can we do better?” That was a long answer.

Sipe: It was.

Williams: I’m sorry. I get that from my father, he’s long winded too.

Sipe: So, any specific things we could do better? Because your answer was pretty broad.

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Williams: You know, and I—it’s not one of those where—I don’t think I’m the one to say specifically what can happen, because I think we’re all looking at everything from a different lens. And I think it’s really just about having conversation, and it’s about reflecting. And that’s one thing that I’ve always tried to do even with me being a principal, is there are things that happen in the classroom between a teacher and a student, and when I call that parent in, the first thing I say to that parent is “You and I have to remove ourselves, because we really don’t know what happened. We weren’t in the classroom. They were in the classroom, but we weren’t. So whatever rush to judgment that we have, right or wrong, we can’t do that.” And so I think, I don’t know if I can necessarily say that there’s anything specific that we can change. But I think a lot of it does go back to education. And I think the reason that I can sit here and say what I’m saying is because I do have an appreciation of the history of what’s happened. And I hate to make everything about education, but for me it is.

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And I think if people in general knew more about what people had to go through to get us to where we are right now, we’d have a better appreciation for not letting some of the things happen that happen on a daily basis. Emphasis on daily basis. And I think the media tries to portray that these things don’t happen every single day, and there’s things that happen every single day that need to be reflected upon. But you gotta know your history, gotta know your history.

Sipe: So, we’re kinda talking about discrimination here. Have you ever felt like you were the victim of discrimination, based on your race?

Williams: I’ll answer that two different ways. Have I ever felt like I was the victim of discrimination? No. Have I been the victim of discrimination? Yes. But that just goes back to the support system that I have, and my parents and the other mentors that I’ve had that I have named is being the victim or seeing yourself as the victim is only gonna get you so far.

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So you have to have that inner strength, you have to press forward. And then almost, it's kinda in a weird way it's a sense of motivation. I mean so if there are people that either subconsciously think you can't do it, or they really think you can't do it and say it to your face, that becomes motivation for me as a leader. And I'm just thinking about me personally as a building leader, I'm relatively young, I'm only 32. So the first discrimination that comes to mind is some people will look at me and say, What is this teacher, who's only been an administrator one year, going to do with our building, who's been an F for years and years. He's young. He hasn't taught twenty-five years, what does he know? So what you have to do is you have to go out and prove yourself. So that discrimination—have I been discriminated against? Yes. And I'm sure a lot of people, regardless of race and gender, can say that. But it's all about how you use it, and you gotta use it as a tool.

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Sipe: So can you give me a specific example of when you were discriminated and how you've used that as a tool?

Williams: I would say, if we're sticking with the education part of it, there aren't too many African-American male principals, especially in Marion, Indiana, there are none. And I believe I'm only the second, in the city of Marion to actually be an African-American male principal, so one, I take pride in that in itself, but there are going to be those doubters. You're gonna have those parents that—um—they're gonna have that look on their face when they come into the building and say, I would like to speak with the principal, and then I give them a big smile and I say "Well, I am the principal. Would you like to come in my office?" And then you have some people that blatantly will tell you, You don't know what my child is going through.

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If they know my background, You've never been through that before, how can you help my child? And I let them know that it's about caring. And if I care about your student, I care about your student regardless of what situation they've come from. So that would be a prime example. I could probably name a few more, but that'd be the first one that comes to mind.

Sipe: Now that you're an administrator, do you ever miss being a classroom teacher?

Williams: I would like to think that I'm still a teacher. You still kind of have to get some things in place before you can spend more time in a classroom. So, I mean you have to get that climate and culture. So you have to have to that climate of students wanting to come to school every day, excited about it. Teachers have to want to be there, be excited about teaching. Once you get that in place, then you can start to work on that culture of what your building is like. What's the mission?